



COUNTY LINE

ALACHUA COUNTY EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER

January 2019



A Message from Michele Lieberman, County Manager

When I began this journey in August of 2017, employee morale was generally low, relationships with other cities and stakeholders were poor, and the community perception was that the County was difficult to work with. The Board of County Commissioners knew this had to change and entrusted me to begin moving the organization in the right direction.

The tone of any organization is set from the top. So, when I first became Interim Manager, I had a conversation with the County's Department Directors to set my expectations for the organization – expectations that I believed would begin to turn around the feelings and perceptions about County government both internally and externally. I referred to those expectations as the three C's.

Upon the Board's decision to officially appoint me as your County Manager last October, I felt it was important to have that same conversation with the County's front line leaders. In November, approximately 75 County supervisors and managers gathered for a half-day retreat focused on my vision for our organization. After just over a year in the position, my expectations have developed into the five C's.

I believe it is now appropriate to bring this message to each and every one of you – the more than 900 dedicated employees whose role it is to carry out the County's mission of responsible stewardship and responsive service to our 263,000 County residents.



Collaboration:

Collaboration between departments and divisions, among departments and divisions, among staff, and with the County Attorney's Office is essential. It is important that we support one another as individuals and as working teams by including all who need to be "at the table" when discussing new or existing projects, programs and services. Disagreements will happen,

and are expected to be resolved at the lowest level possible and should be done quickly, privately, professionally and in the best interest of the organization. If necessary, higher-level employees may be brought in to help reach resolution.

Competence:

As an organization, accountability skilled employees whether at the important to the County's mission



is key. Alachua County strives to hire competent and front line of service or executive management. It is that every employee perform their job to the best of their ability, in other words, to do the work we were hired to do. Leaders at all levels are expected to hold employees to account for their achievements, and for those skills or knowledge needing improvement. If anyone feels they need skills, advice or assistance to deal with certain situations, there are people to help i.e., Training, Human Resources.



Consideration:

Consideration of each other as colleagues is first and foremost. We often spend more waking hours in a week with each other than with our own families. Consideration for the public must also be observed at all times. We are a public government entity, but in many respects, we are not unlike a publicly traded company. The Commissioners are our board of directors, and the citizens of Alachua County are our stockholders. It is their investment in our county that pays your salary, good, bad or indifferent.

Customer service is a priority. It is a priority for each employee in everything we do, whether it is enforcing codes, dealing with probationers, someone answering a telephone, inspecting a home, or mowing the grass in the right of way. There is no excuse for rudeness to the public. Our best customer service efforts mean not sending someone away with a simple, “No.” We must not leave our citizens to wonder how to get something accomplished. It is imperative that we provide our customers with alternatives, options or other places to go, and to assist them through a process, whatever that process might be. It should always be our goal to inform and educate our public as we serve them.



Creativity:

Building a creative workplace is a great way to build a sense of belonging, a sense that individuals and work teams are able to openly share ideas and make a difference. It is up to all of us to encourage and support creative effort. Supervisors, managers, directors and executive leadership should solicit employee ideas where possible and create an environment where employees are comfortable sharing. This is critical to ensuring you feel valued as an employee. It is also critical to ensuring the best outcome for the County and its citizens.

“Because we have always done it this way,” is never an acceptable answer. We must be willing to think outside the box and not settle for the status quo. We must always question – Is this the right way? Is there a better way? A more efficient way? Engaging our employees and listening to their ideas is one way to accomplish this.



Culture:

Culture is the character and personality of an organization. It is exhibited in our values, our interactions, behaviors and attitudes. The bottom line is that it is our reputation among our public and our current and prospective employees. Collaboration, competence, consideration and creativity all play a role in its creation.

Culture is important because it either strengthens or undermines our organizational objectives. Somewhere along the line in the history of this organization, departments became siloed. Many, if not most of you have experienced it in one way or another. It is not acceptable and it must change. You each do not stand as a separate unit of government. We – individually and as a whole – are here for the benefit of the citizens of Alachua County. All decisions must be made for the good of the organization and the community. This is achieved by encouraging, being open to and respecting all viewpoints, and through open and honest communication.

When we hide or do not fully disclose information we jeopardize the organization's success. When we publicly disagree with one another we undermine the public's faith in our abilities. While the honest, open and free flow of ideas may sometimes result in debate, when a decision is made it must be supported. If it is the wrong decision, there will be accountability for that decision at the appropriate level.

The decisions we make must also reflect the goals, policies and values of the Board of County Commissioners. It is the purview of the Board of County Commissioners to set policy. It is our job to implement Board policy, and to recommend policy when asked or when we believe it necessary to further the goals that the Board has established. When the Board makes a decision, it is your role to implement that determination, even if your recommendation was on the losing end of the vote, and regardless of whether that determination was established by a 3-2, 4-1 or unanimous vote, It is not acceptable to undermine or fail to follow those decisions that you disagree with. It is equally unacceptable to cater to one commissioner's viewpoint. We do not work for one commissioner, but for five. We must present fair and balanced information to all.

We have made great strides toward achieving the goals I set 18 months ago, and I believe we are moving in the right direction. However, we cannot become complacent. We must continue to move forward in our efforts to create the best Alachua County possible. It is doable, but every employee must do their part. I believe you each have a role to play in creating a legacy we can all be proud of.



Collaboration



Competence



Consideration



Creativity



Culture